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May 2, 2016 6:22 pm

# Germany to push for progress towards European army

Alex Barker in Brussels and Stefan Wagstyl in Berlin

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Kurdish peshmerga fighter training with the German Bundeswehr

Germany is to push for progress towards a European army by advocating a joint headquarters and shared military assets, according to defence plans that could ricochet into Britain's EU referendum campaign.

Although Berlin has long paid lip-service to forming a "European defence union", the white paper is one of the most significant for Germany in recent years and may be seized by anti-integration Brexit campaigners as a sign where the bloc is heading.

Initially scheduled to emerge shortly before the June 23 referendum vote but now probably delayed to July, the draft paper seen by the Financial Times outlines steps to gradually co-ordinate Europe's patchwork of national militaries and embark on permanent co-operation under common structures.

In this and other areas, its tone reflects Germany's growing clout and confidence in pursuing a

foreign policy backed by elements of hard power. Initiatives range from strengthening cyberwarfare abilities to contentious proposals to relax the postwar restrictions on army operations within Germany.

“German security policy has relevance — also far beyond our country,” the paper states. “Germany is willing to join early, decisively and substantially as a driving force in international debates . . . to take responsibility and assume leadership”.

Jan Techau, a former defence official at Carnegie Europe, said: “This is the time of a new Germany. This is probably the first time a German defence white paper is something like important.”

At the European level, the paper calls for “the use of all possibilities” available under EU treaties to establish deep co-operation between willing member states, create a joint civil-military headquarters for EU operations, a council of defence ministers, and better co-ordinate the production and sharing of military equipment.

“The more we Europeans are ready to take on a greater share of the common burden and the more our American partner is prepared to go along the road of common decision-making, the further the transatlantic security partnership will develop greater intensity and richer results,” the paper states.

Resistance to serious defence integration is well entrenched in many EU states and has hobbled efforts to make meaningful progress in common defence. Co-ordinated hard military power in Europe remains largely the preserve of Nato.

However, about 37 EU security missions have been launched since 2003, including recent operations in Mali and against piracy. If vigorously pursued in Brussels, Germany’s call for joint civil military headquarters would be an important step in enhancing the bloc’s capabilities and ambitions.

The creation of a European army is a long way off, but it is a strategic necessity to implement important steps to pave the way towards it now

- Roderich Kiesewetter, Bundestag member

“The creation of a European army is a long way off, but it is a strategic necessity to implement important steps to pave the way towards it now,” wrote Roderich Kiesewetter, a Bundestag foreign affairs committee member, in a recent paper.

Berlin is aware that its call for more European defence — long a bugbear of British Eurosceptics — could inadvertently resonate in the UK referendum campaign. Although publication was first expected in early June, this has been delayed to July, according to people familiar with the process.

Liam Fox, former UK defence secretary and Brexit supporter, said that “many in the European project see Nato as an impediment to ever closer union”.

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Mr Fox added: “Their every instinct is to move towards European defence co-operation. The problem is that while they are unwilling to

spend money, it is a dangerous fantasy that diverts money away from Nato.”

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The paper says that the EU’s defence industry is “organised nationally and seriously fragmented”, raising costs, handicapping it in international competition and making it difficult for national militaries to operate together.

- Liam Fox, former UK defence secretary and Brexit supporter

“It is therefore necessary that military capabilities are jointly planned, developed, managed, procured and deployed to raise the interoperability of Europe’s defence forces and to further improve Europe’s capacity to act,” the paper states.

However it adds this should not impinge Germany’s “own technological sovereignty” over crucial technologies. It comes against the backdrop of a series of embarrassing equipment failures in recent years when Germany deployed its military overseas.

The white paper also lands in the middle of the growing debate in Germany about whether the military should be deployed domestically in the event of terrorist attacks and other threats to law and order.

While German troops already assist in civil emergencies, such as floods, and have helped in the refugee crisis, deployments to deal with violence or threats of violence have long been banned for fear of evoking Nazi-era practices. The draft proposes ending that ban given “the character and dynamic of current and future security-political threats”.

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